Green Bay Road Bridge
(Pigeon Creek Bridge)
Spanning Pigeon Creek on Green Bay Road
Thiensville
Ozaukee County
Wisconsin

HAER No. WI-53

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Location:	Spanning Pigeon Creek at Green Bay Road Thiensville, Ozaukee County, Wisconsin
Date of Construction:	1922 (Bridge Plate)
Present Owner:	Ozaukee County Ozaukee County Courthouse Port Washington, Wisconsin
Present Use:	Vehicular and pedestrian bridge
Significance:	The Green Bay Road Bridge, a reinforced concrete deck girder, is of local historical significance as a contributing element of the Thiensville Historic District. The district is historically significant as the principal commercial district of the village of Thiensville and for its association with the Bublitz family, who were instrumental in the development and growth of the village. The bridge railing design and period lighting standards contribute to the sense of time and place created within the district boundaries.
Historian:	Peter J. Adams Peter James Adams & Associates Neenah, Wisconsin
Preparer:	Ruekert & Mielke, Inc. Waukesha, Wisconsin

I. HISTORY

Treaties with the Menomonee and Pottawotomie Indians opened the area known as Thiensville to settlement in 1833. Land sales followed these treaties, along with the opening of the Green Bay Road in 1836. As in most parts of Wisconsin, the first settlers were largely from New England, followed by Germans and Irish immigrants. The most prominent of these was Joachim Heinrich Thien, who purchased land east of Pigeon Creek overlooking the Milwaukee River. In 1842, he laid out a village plat on this land and erected the Thiensville flour mills. When the town of Mequon incorporated in 1846, his residence was the site of the first town meeting.

While Thien's village did not immediately materialize, the settled did become a flour and saw milling center of the German farming community of Mequon. It also served as a stop on the Green Bay-Milwaukee stage line, prompting the construction of several hotels on Green Bay Road. Officially recognized as "Thiensville" in 1843, the settlement gained popularity among middle-class Milwaukee Germans as a resort community. At the turn of the century, rail connections and interurban service encouraged a marked period of growth and development. Not long afterwards, the Thiensville State Bank was incorporated, the Gilbert Shoe Company opened, and various commercial buildings were constructed by John Bublitz and his sons, creating commercial district of late 19th and early 20th century buildings along Main Street.

When Thiensville incorporated in 1910, the Bublitz family played an important role in its early governance. Oscar Bublitz served as village treasurer, while Otto served on both the village board and the committee that studied the construction of a village hall. In 1913, the Fire Engine Company donated the land and contributed $1,000 towards the cost of construction of the hall. Completed in 1914, the Village Hall housed the fire department and lock-up on the first floor and the village offices on the second.

Located immediately adjacent to the Village Hall, the Green Bay Road Bridge is a reinforced concrete deck girder. The bridge replaced a wood frame bridge, which had a span length of 34 feet and an overall width of 16 feet. Pigeon Creek was normally about 10 feet wide, 1.5 feet deep, and flowed slowly. During floods, however, it flowed swiftly, rose about 8.0 feet, and overflowed the existing wood bridge. By 1920, the village was anxious to have a new bridge.[1]

In March 1920, the State Highway Commission (SHC) provided general recommendations and generic plans for the new bridge. Inquiry as to whether a bridge from Darlington, Lafayette County, could be reused at this site was answered in the negative. The initial SHC analysis included proposals for raising the bridge floor and changing the creek channel to handle the flooding problem. The SHC also recommended a baluster railing and at least one sidewalk.

The new bridge floor was to be approximately 2.8 feet higher than the existing. The channel change was a shift of some 30 feet to the east and amounted to putting the new west shore near the existing east abutment. The initial survey sketch of the proposed bridge showed a solid railing, but the SHC wrote below the sketch that a baluster railing was "desirable." A letter from

the SHC district office to the central office explained that this recommendation was made because the bridge was in a village. Although the plans subsequently prepared by the SHC showed such a railing, the bridge was built with the plain solid railing of the initial sketch. A sidewalk was needed, according to the SHC report, because the automobile traffic here was very heavy. Two sidewalks would be acceptable, the SHC continued, if necessary for aesthetics or a balanced design, and two sidewalks were provided.[2]

Apparently some of the adjacent landowners were initially upset by the width of the bridge as presented by the SHC. A bridge with a 24-foot roadway and two sidewalks would require additional right-of-way. This concern may explain why the SHC report was done in April 1920, but bids were not solicited until two years later. At least some residents wanted a narrower bridge, and no additional right-of-way taken from their property. In 1922, the correspondent from the News was happy to report that the matter was fully settled and a "full-width" bridge would be built.[3]

The final plans were detailed by J. H. E. Mueller. Mr. Mueller was a local, and virtually anonymous, engineer who was also justice of the peace for the village at this time.[4] The contractor was John W. Vierck of Menomonee Falls.[5] Like Mr. Mueller, Mr. Vierck is known primarily for his association with this bridge.[6]

The new bridge provided continued access to retail merchants, the Thiensville mills and the German hotels, and its construction was a locally important event. The progress of construction was followed in the Thiensville column of the Cedarburg News. Bids were due on June 7, 1922, with work to start 15 days later. The bids ranged from $5,985 to $9,000. The News' Thiensville correspondent continued to provide optimistic reports of early completion and enthusiastic evaluations of Mr. Vierck's hard work. Sand and gravel was provided for the project from the village pit. The village also put up a footbridge with lights as a temporary crossing. the west abutment was in place by the end of June and the east abutment two weeks later. By the end of July, all of the carpenter and falsework was done and it was expected that the "platform," or deck, would be poured within a week. the deck would have to cure for three weeks before it could be used for traffic. On August 9, the News reported that the new bridge would be open around August 20, and that a celebration was rumored. The celebration took place, beginning with an automobile parade through the village and across the bridge. The village president and board led the way, followed by the fire engine and 60 other cars. There was a bag of candy for every boy and girl, various games and races, with prizes donated by local businesses and individuals, and dancing until midnight. A live band provided the music.[7]

II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Green Bay Road Bridge is a single-span bridge with reinforced concrete deck girders. The span is 39.9 feet long and the overall length is 47.9 feet. The roadway is 24 feet wide and the overall width is 39 feet. Concrete retaining abutments extend east and west along the south side of the bridge and to the west along the north side. The northwest wingwall abutment, shown on

the original plans were eliminated during the construction of the bridge because of the encroachment of the old village hall.[8] Side railings include concrete coffered endposts with flared ends and lighting standards. The lighting standards are functional and have not been altered, except for the installation of plastic globes. The bridge deck has been patched with an asphalt overlay and the north sidewalk has been repaired.

From its inception in 1908, the State Highway Commission promoted reinforced concrete bridges, and by the early 1920s, several thousand had been constructed. The Pigeon Creek Bridge is representative of one of two major designs promoted by the commission. The other design had open spindle side rails.[9]

III. OWNERSHIP AND FUTURE

The Green Bay Road Bridge is owned and maintained by Ozaukee County. When it was inspected in September 1984, the bridge received a poor rating for its deck, superstructure, and substructure. All of these major structural elements had major problems, and weight limits were recommended. A 1988 inspection resulted in a decision to post an 8-ton load limit on the bridge. This limit meant that village garbage trucks, some school buses, and fire department vehicles in non-emergency situations had to use alternate routes. By June 1989, the Green Bay Road Bridge had a sufficiency rating of 2 out of a possible 100 points.[10]

The proposed project would replace the existing bridge with a wider bridge with only minor modifications to the existing horizontal and vertical roadway alignments. Elements of the bridge were offered to the Museum Division of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, but none were determined appropriate for preservation.[11]

IV. SOURCES OF PROJECT INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings

Microfilm Files, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Bridge Section, Madison.

B. Bibliography

Anzia, Marie. History of Thiensville. News Graphic, Inc., 1976. Cedarburg, Wisconsin.

"Case 106 Report for the Green Bay Road Bridge." Ruekert & Mielke, Inc., 1986.

_____. "Mequon-Thiensville: As We Know It." League of Women Voters of Ozaukee County, 1965.

Cedarburg News. June 7, 14, 21, 28; July 5, 26; August 2, 9, 23, 1922.

Cedarburg News Graphic Pilot. June 19, 1989.

Crowley, William. State Historical Society of Wisconsin, to James Etmanczyk, Environmental Analysis Section, Bureau of Environmental and Data Anal;lysis, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, April 3, 1987. Transcript in the possession of James Entmanczyk, WisDOT project file ID-2697-02-00, Madison, Wisconsin.

Downs, Winfred Scott, ed. Who's Who in Engineering. New York, 1922-23, 1925.

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"Structural Analysis of Old Fire Station/Village Hall, Thiensville, WI.," Computerized Structural Design, Milwaukee, Wisconsin: WisDOT, project file ID-2697-02-00, June 14, 1989. Photocopied.

Torkelson, M. W. "Wisconsin Highways." Wisconsin Blue Book. Madison, Wisconsin, 1933, pp. 9-11.

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Wisconsin Section of American Society of Professional Engineers. Historical Record of the Wisconsin Section, American Society of Civil Engineers, 1923-1975. (Milwaukee, Wisconsin ?): By the author, n.d.

Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Bridge Section. "Kenosha 1956-1961, Ozaukee, 1912-1936." Thiensville Bridge, Thiensville, Ozaukee County, 1920. Reels F30, M8, P1, Madison, Wisconsin.

Wisconsin Department of Transportation. Project file, Project ID-2697-02-00, Madison, Wisconsin, 1984-1988.

Wisconsin State Highway Commission. Fifth Biennial Report, January 1, 1922 to January 1, 1924. Madison, Wisconsin, 1924, pp. 216-231.

Wisconsin State Highway Commission. Preliminary Biennial Report on State Road Construction, July 1, 1911 to January 1, 1913. Madison, Wisconsin, 1913, pp. 17-18.

VI. ENDNOTES

1. Bridge plate; Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), Bridge Section, Microfilm Files, Reel F30, "Kenosha, 1956-1961, Ozaukee, 1912-1936," Thiensville (Bridge, Ozaukee Co., 1920.

2. WisDOT, Bridge Section, Microfilm Files, Reed F30, Thiensville Bridge.

3. Cedarburg News, June 7, 14, 1922, page 8, column 1.

4. WisDOT, Bridge Section, Microfilm Files, Reel M8, Frame N1642; Reel P1, Frames X441, X442; Reel F30, "Kenosha, 1956-1961, Ozaukee, 1912-1936," Thiensville, Ozaukee Co., 1920. There is no evidence that the village had a position of engineer at this time. Mr. Mueller was also hired by the village for at least one other highway project, "surveying the hill road in order to make repair on same." Cedarburg News, August 30, 1922, page 8, column 1. Mr. Mueller did not advertise in the business directories, and was not found in standard lists of engineers. P. O. Heyrman, publisher, Directory for Ozaukee County, 1923; Whitewater, WI, n.d., p. 36; Wright Directory Company, Wright's Directory for Milwaukee, 1912, 1922, 1932, Milwaukee, 1912, 1922, 1932; Wisconsin Section of American Society of Civil Engineers, Historical Record of the Wisconsin Section, American Society of Civil Engineers, 1923-1975, (Milwaukee?), n.d.; John W. Leonard, ed., Who's Who in Engineering, 1922-23, 1925, New York; Winfred Scott Downs, ed., op. cit., 1931, New York, 1931.

5. Bridge Plate; WisDOT, Microfilm Files, Cedarburg News July 26, 1922, page 8, column 1.

6. Directory for Ozaukee County, 1923; Wright's Directory for Milwaukee, 1922. The Cedarburg News Thiensville correspondent implied that Mr. Vierck had a good reputation as a contractor and predicted he would finish ahead of schedule, June 14, 1922. This correspondent was an enthusiastic supporter of this project, however, and as he misspelled Mr. Vierck's name at this first mention of him, his generous evaluation of Mr. Vierck's reputation probably only represents boosterism.

7. Cedarburg News, June 7, 14, 18, 21; July 5, 26; August 2, 9, 23, 1922. The Thiensville column was always on page 8, and typically at the top of column 1.

8. "Structural Analysis of Old Fire Station/Village Hall, Thiensville, WI." Computerized Structural design, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: WisDOT, Project File, ID 2697-02-00, June 14, 1989), 1, number photocopied.

9. WisDOT, Bridge Section, Computerized and Card Inventory Files, Bridge P-45-0701; M. W. Torkelson, "Wisconsin Highways," Wisconsin Blue Book, Madison, 1933, pp. 9-11; Wisconsin State Highway Commission (SHC), Preliminary Biennial Report on State Road Construction, July 1, 1911 to Jan. 1, 1913, Madison, 1913, pp. 17-18; SHC, Fifth Biennial Report, January 1, 1922 to January 1, 1924, Madison, 1924, pp. 216-231. In 1907, a Highway Division was created in the Geological and Natural History Survey. In 1911, it became a separate, the State Highway Commission. In 1967, the SHC was reorganized and renamed the Department of Transportation.

10. Ruekert Mielke, Inc., "Case 106 Report [sic] for the Green Bay Road Bridge," December 3, 1985, project file, Project ID 2697-02-00 SHSW and WisDOT; Edward A. Geick, Village Administrator, to Robert S. Newbery, personal correspondence, September 21, 1984, WisDOT project file; Milwaukee Journal, November 2, 1988; Cedarburg News Graphic Pilot, June 19, 1989.

11. William Crowley, Museum Administrator, State Historical Society of Wisconsin (SHSW), to James Etmanczyk, Chief, Environmental Analysis Section, Bureau of Environmental & Data Analysis, WisDOT, personal correspondence, April 3, 1989; Richard Horn, Museum Curator, SHSW, to Todd B. Weik, Ruekert & Miekle, Inc., January 20, 1988, personal correspondence, project file, WisDOT Project ID 2627-02-00.